United Nations CEDAW/C/SR.1191

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
20 February 2014

English only

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Fifty-seventh session

Summary record of the 1191st meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 13 February 2014, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ameline

Contents

Consideration of reports of States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (*continued*)

Initial report of Qatar

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (*continued*)

Initial report of Qatar (CEDAW/C/QAT/1; CEDAW/C/QAT/Q/1 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Qatar took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the initial report of Qatar (CEDAW/C/QAT/1) had been drafted with the involvement of several governmental and non-governmental bodies. Her Government's commitment to human rights had been underscored by its adoption, in 2008, of the 2030 Qatar National Vision, which addressed important human rights issues and emphasized capacity-building for women and their economic and political empowerment, particularly with regard to decision-making.

3. The unusual profile of the population of Qatar — the majority of the population was non-Qatari, 75 per cent of the population was male and the total population had tripled over the past 10 years — had given rise to considerable challenges with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights in general and women's rights in particular. As part of the State's efforts to respond to those challenges, it had become party to a number of international human rights treaties, which, pursuant to article 68 of the Constitution, had the force of law once they had been ratified and published in the official gazette. Every effort had been made to implement the provisions of those treaties and to bring domestic laws into line with the international law instruments to which Qatar was party.

4. A number of governmental and non-governmental institutions devoted to the promotion and protection of human rights had been set up, including the National Human Rights Commission, which was in compliance with the Paris Principles. The Supreme Council for Family Affairs was an independent body responsible for promoting the role of the family and women in society. Civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations such as the Qatar Foundation for the Protection of Children and Women, played an important part in upholding women's rights as well. A national development strategy, which included a sectoral strategy for promoting family cohesion and women's empowerment, had been adopted for the period from 2011 to 2016. As part of that strategy, steps were being taken to increase the number of women in leadership positions and to establish civil society organizations to address women's issues.

5. Progress had been made towards ensuring universal access to education, promoting gender equality and eradicating gender disparities in education. Girls' enrolment in the Qatar Community College had risen to more than 50 per cent of the total student body by the end of 2013. Women's participation in the labour market and in public life had also increased, and around 27 per cent of business managers were women. Efforts were being made to increase women's involvement in decision-making and to appoint more women to the diplomatic service; the first female Qatari ambassador had been appointed in 2013 to Croatia.

6. The Government of Qatar attached great importance to international cooperation and had hosted numerous international meetings, including the Third Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on the Advancement of Women in 2012.

7. Although steps had been taken to bring domestic laws into line with the Convention, challenges remained. Efforts to achieve that alignment therefore continued. To date, new legislation had been drafted on domestic workers, children's rights, the rights of Qatari women married to non-Qatari men, and litigation procedures in family matters, as well as amendments to the Family Code and laws related to violence against women. Several

committees were to be set up to analyse the implications of new legislation for women and cross-check them with the international treaties to which Qatar was party in order to identify any discrepancies. Measures could then be taken to improve harmonization. Particular attention would be paid to provisions on part-time work for women and on the family court system.

8. **Ms. Patten** said that she would like to know whether Qatar intended to ratify the core human rights treaties to which it was not yet party. Given the State party's heavy dependence on migrant labour, she would be particularly interested to hear whether there were any plans to ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Although the principle of equality was enshrined in article 35 of the Constitution, it did not yet include a definition of discrimination against women in line with article 1 of the Convention. Was the Constitutional Court operational and was it accessible to non-Qataris who were residing in Qatar? She wished to know whether a gender impact analysis of the bills currently under review had been conducted and whether a timetable had been set for their adoption. Lastly, she would like to know whether a legal aid system was in place in the State party and what efforts were being made to enhance the visibility of the Convention.

9. **Ms. Šimonović** said that although article 68 of the Constitution stated that all approved treaties had "the power of law after ratification and publication in the official gazette", it also stated that "reconciliation treaties and treaties pertaining to the territory of the State or those relating to the right of sovereignty or public or private rights of the citizens, or those that involve an amendment of the laws of the State shall come into force when the same are issued as a law". Since the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women concerned the public and private rights of women, she wondered whether it could be invoked directly in the courts or whether its provisions must be incorporated into a national law.

10. The State party's declaration concerning article 1 of the Convention seemed unnecessary, since the words "irrespective of their marital status" were not intended to encourage family relationships outside of marriage. She would appreciate clarification regarding the State party's reservation to article 2 (a) in connection with the rules of the hereditary transmission of authority and would be interested in seeing examples of legislation that expressly prohibited discrimination against women.

11. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the State party had submitted a reservation to article 2 (a) because that article ran counter to article 8 of the Constitution.

12. **Mr. Al-Obaedli** (Qatar) said that the State party did not intend to ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

13. **Mr. Al-Muhannadi** (Qatar) said that the Constitution did not discriminate between Qataris and non-Qataris; all persons were equal before the law. The bill on domestic workers was currently before parliament for its consideration. Given the challenges posed by the composition of the population, that bill required careful study in order to ensure that it was in line with all other relevant national laws and international instruments to which Qatar was party. The bill on the status of children of Qatari women married to non-Qataris had been submitted to parliament by the Supreme Council for Family Affairs.

14. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the processing of draft laws was part of a legislative cycle, and the amount of time necessary for their passage therefore varied depending on how heavy the workload of the Majlis Al-Shura, the legislature of Qatar, was at the time. While there was political will to accede to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the procedures entailed in the ratification of international instruments had already placed a

heavy burden on Qatar's legislative authorities, and they would therefore need time to assess the implications of accession. Qatar did, indeed, have a legal aid system.

15. **Mr. Al-Mulla** (Qatar) said that legal assistance was provided to victims of violence, including legal aid services. Every effort was made to ensure that perpetrators of violence did not reoffend.

16. **Mr. Al-Muhannadi** (Qatar) said that, under article 68 of the Constitution, international treaties ratified by the State of Qatar assumed the force of law upon their publication in the official gazette, and of course that provision was applied throughout the judicial system.

17. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the Supreme Council for Family Affairs placed great importance on raising awareness of the provisions of the Convention and had, even prior to ratification, held a series of educational seminars and workshops on the Convention. Awareness-raising events were open to the public, and webcasts of them could be accessed through the websites of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and the National Human Rights Commission.

18. **Ms. Patten** said that she would appreciate further clarification regarding the State party's plans to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and regarding the question as to whether or not the Convention could be invoked in Qatari courts.

19. **Ms. Šimonović** said that it would be useful if Qatar submitted a core document in which it explained how international treaties were applied in the country. She wished to know whether it was the Convention or national law that had primacy in the event of a conflict between the two.

20. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that international treaties to which Qatar was party were published in the official gazette, had the full force of law and had primacy over national law.

21. **Mr. Al-Muhannadi** (Qatar) said that the two human rights covenants would be ratified if, after careful consideration, they were found to be in line with national legislation and local traditions and customs.

22. **Ms. Patten** asked the delegation to provide examples of cases in which the Convention had been applied by the courts.

23. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that there had not yet been a situation in which the courts had needed to choose whether to invoke national law or the Convention. However, a review of the Family Code was under way, and any amendments that were introduced would be in conformity with the Convention.

24. **Ms. Pires** said that she would like further information on the specific mandate of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, the resources allotted to it and its level of visibility in the Government. What kind of impact had the restructuring of the Council had on the machinery for the advancement of women? She wished to know how the Council reconciled its role in promoting family cohesion with the need to empower women and do away with stereotypes about their place in the family and in society. She would be interested to learn how the Council ensured gender mainstreaming in government policies and whether the progress made thus far under the Qatar National Development Strategy for 2011–2016 had been assessed. She wished to know what the Council's position on the bill on domestic violence was, whether it intended to monitor the action taken in response to the Committee's concluding observations, and whether it had been monitoring the implementation of the recommendations accepted by Qatar at its most recent universal periodic review.

25. **Ms. Neubauer** said that she wished to know whether the State party's report had been posted on the website of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and whether the Committee's concluding observations would also be made available on that site. She was concerned by the fact that civil society organizations lacked personnel with technical expertise in human rights in general and in women's rights in particular, as acknowledged in the State party's report. How did the Government plan to build capacity in that area? How had gender mainstreaming been supported and applied since the adoption of the Qatar National Development Strategy for 2011–2016, and who was responsible for coordinating and monitoring gender mainstreaming throughout the Government? Lastly, she would like to know how familiar the members of the Majlis Al-Shura were with the Convention and the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination against women.

26. **The Chairperson** asked what links existed between the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and government ministries and how it coordinated its work with other bodies.

27. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the Council was an independent government body funded by the State. Its budget for each year was based on its planned activities, which included training sessions, conferences and awareness-raising campaigns. The Council coordinated its work with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health on a daily basis. It also involved civil society organizations in its activities.

28. **Ms. Al-Murekhi** (Qatar) said that the Council was a policymaking body that dealt with social and family matters and that provided oversight for policy implementation. As it was under the aegis of the Office of the Emir, it was, in turn, subject to close monitoring by senior government authorities. The Council had played a key role in the preparation of the Qatar National Development Strategy for 2011–2016 and especially of the part of that strategy concerned with gender mainstreaming. Women's issues were addressed in each of the areas making up the strategy's four main pillars. The Council had also striven to ensure that special attention was devoted to the problem of violence against women.

29. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the State party's report was available on the website of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs. Several different bodies had worked actively to disseminate the report, which bore witness to the country's political will to promote and protect women's rights.

30. **Ms. Al-Sulaiti** (Qatar) said that men and women had access to education on an equal footing, as guaranteed by the Constitution.

31. **Ms. Neubauer** said that since, according to the State party's report, there were no specialized women's associations in the country, she would like to know what steps the Government was taking to encourage women to establish such associations. She wished to know whether the annual budget of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs had been increasing or decreasing since its establishment and how many staff members it had.

32. **Ms. Patten** said that she would appreciate information about the civil society organizations that worked with the Council, as it was her understanding that Act No. 12 of 2004 made it very difficult for such organizations to operate.

33. **The Chairperson** asked what measures the Government planned to take in order to provide assistance to women victims of violence and to help to ensure that they could secure redress through the courts.

34. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the Supreme Council for Family Affairs had a governing council, a secretariat and six directorates. All the directorates worked together to design the Council's annual programme and its budget proposal, which were then submitted to the Ministry of Finance. The budget had been increasing from year to year. The Council

employed 55 professional staff and 25 auxiliary staff. Most of its staff members were Qatari women, but it also had male and foreign staff members.

35. All projects carried out by the Council were subject to a yearly evaluation. The State party had gone to great pains to draft its initial report in accordance with the Committee's guidelines. Training workshops were held in cooperation with the United Nations and other bodies to build capacity in the preparation of reports.

36. Private associations did exist in Qatar and operated in accordance with Act No. 12 of 2004. They dealt with matters involving children, human trafficking and other social issues. There were no legal barriers to the establishment of women's associations, but it was not the Council's role to encourage women to set up such organizations; Qatari women themselves should take responsibility for leading that process.

37. **Ms. Gabr** said that temporary special measures differed from positive measures in that they were time-bound and addressed a specific need. They did not run counter to the Islamic sharia or to national laws, and she urged the State party to make use of them. She would be interested to learn whether such measures were included in the Qatar National Development Strategy for 2011–2016. Further information would be appreciated on efforts to increase the number of women in decision-making positions, including the time frame envisaged for the achievement of that goal. She would also like to urge the State party to act upon the recommendations that it had accepted during the most recent universal periodic review concerning women's empowerment and participation in political and public life. She noted that there were no women in the Majlis Al-Shura, and she would like to know whether the Government was considering using temporary special measures to increase women's participation in politics and in the judiciary.

38. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the Government had introduced several temporary special measures to benefit women. For example, children of Qatari women married to foreign men were issued residency permits for as long as they remained in the country. They were also issued travel documents and had access to education and health services on an equal footing with Qataris, and as adults they were given special consideration when applying for Qatari citizenship. Thanks to the use of such measures in the field of education, about 25,000 women had graduated from Qatar University since its establishment in 1976.

39. **Mr. Al-Muhannadi** (Qatar) said that women would be free to run as candidates when elections to the Majlis Al-Shura were held. While the members designated by the Emir did not include any women, there was no legal barrier to the appointment of women.

40. **Ms. Gabr** asked whether it might be possible to establish a quota for the number of seats to be held by women in the Majlis Al-Shura or other political bodies.

41. **The Chairperson** said that, while the Committee was aware that Qatari law did not discriminate against women, its members were interested in determining what obstacles might prevent women from exercising their rights in practice.

42. **Ms. Schulz** said that the series of measures that had been introduced to alleviate the disadvantages suffered by children of Qatari women married to foreign men did not qualify as temporary special measures under the definition set out in the Committee's general recommendations.

43. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that her Government did, in fact, consider those measures to be temporary special measures which had enabled many families to remain together and achieve stability. Elections to the Majlis Al-Shura would be held in accordance with the provisions of the decree that was to be issued by the Emir. Promotions in the civil service were granted on the basis of merit, and the Human Resources Administration Act did not contain any provisions that discriminated against women.

44. **Ms. Acar** asked why the measures adopted for the benefit of children of Qatari women married to foreigners were considered to be temporary. Did that mean that they would be rescinded in the future? She wished to remind the delegation that there was a difference between temporary special measures and positive measures.

45. **Mr. Al Muhannadi** (Qatar) said that the temporary measure under which foreign men married to Qatari women were allowed to acquire Qatari nationality was aimed at enabling them to transfer Qatari nationality to their children. That measure would remain in effect only until the adoption of legislation to regulate the status of such men. Any decision regarding the establishment of electoral quotas would be reflected in a decree issued by the Emir.

46. **Ms. Šimonović** said that, in its second periodic report, it would be useful for the State party to elaborate further on its implementation of article 4.1 of the Convention, which dealt with temporary special measures. Further clarification on that provision was provided in the Committee's general recommendation No. 25.

47. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the State of Qatar was working hard to ensure women's equality in the workplace. The Labour Code provided special benefits for women in both the public and private sectors, including a 60-day period of maternity leave, a 2-year period of leave for nursing mothers and a 3-year period of leave for mothers of a child with a disability. The overall paid leave granted to working women exceeded that of men, which constituted a form of positive discrimination.

48. **Ms. Haidar** said that she was particularly concerned about negative stereotypes and the detrimental effects that they had on women in Qatar. Although the development of a legislative framework to protect women's rights was certainly important, the effective implementation of that framework was even more so. Non-Qataris made up the vast majority of the population of Qatar and included migrant workers and stateless persons, many of whom were women. Some of those women faced multiple forms of discrimination, many of which could ultimately be traced back to negative stereotypes. Stereotypes of that sort were often subscribed to by those women's female employers, as well as others. While she was aware that the Government had developed training programmes for the police and members of the judiciary whose aim was to challenge such stereotypes, she had also noted that those programmes were not compulsory. Furthermore, it was her understanding there were no active women's organizations in Qatar; such associations might otherwise have served as valuable partners in helping to raise awareness about the harmful effects of stereotypes. Given those circumstances, she would be interested to learn how the State planned to go about changing attitudes at the grassroots level.

49. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that she would welcome additional information on the services offered to victims by the Dar al Aman shelter for women and children, the Qatar Foundation for the Protection of Children and Women, and the branch offices of the Qatar Foundation in the Hamad General Hospital, the Doha Police Department and the Office of the Family and Juvenile Court Prosecutor.

50. In its initial report, the State party had said that no steps had been taken to adopt specific legislation to combat violence against women because such violence and related offences were dealt with fully in the Criminal Code. However, there were no data to support the State party's contention that the Criminal Code served as a deterrent to the commission of violence against women because it stipulated that the punishment for physical assault was the death penalty. On the contrary, that argument seemed to be contradicted by the data supplied on the Qatar Foundation's hotline, according to which some two thirds of the approximately 10,000 persons who had made use of the hotline since its inception in June 2010 were women. Those figures were a clear indication of the prevalence of domestic violence, which could not be dealt with solely by means of the

Criminal Code; instead, it must be understood as a more complex phenomenon. In view of the persistence of violence against women, including sexual violence against domestic workers, she was deeply concerned that no specific legislation was being envisaged. What was the position of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs regarding domestic violence in Qatar? She wished to know why the Qatari Government had rejected recommendation 15 of the report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, which concerned the adoption of a national plan to combat gender-based violence (A/HRC/14/2/Add.1).

51. **Ms. Acar** asked what was being done to address the socially accepted culture of discrimination against women that appeared to exist in Qatar. Stereotypes did not reflect mere divisions of labour between men and women but rather the presence of gender inequality. Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, was also a problem that originated in gender inequality; it could be dealt with properly only by addressing its root causes. Experience had shown that violence against women was not only a criminal matter; it was also a social and cultural phenomenon. She would be interested in seeing statistics on the disposition of the cases that had been reported to hotlines and shelters.

52. **Ms. Al-Murekhi** (Qatar) said that domestic violence was an age-old problem that was prevalent throughout the world and was not specific to Qatar. The Government had supplied the statistics compiled by various institutions, including law enforcement agencies and health-care institutions, in its initial report. As indicated in the report, all forms of violence perpetrated against either men or women were offences under the Criminal Code. The Government was engaged in a fact-finding exercise that would lay the foundation for the development of further anti-violence policies and legislation, with special emphasis on domestic violence. A national committee composed of representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Qatari Foundation for the Protection of Children and Women, and the Supreme Health Council had been set up in 2013 to compile statistics on violence and abuse that would serve as a basis for the next step, which would be to collect the additional data needed in order to draft those policies and legislation.

53. **Mr. Al-Obaedli** (Qatar) said that the Minister of Social Affairs signed off on the contracts of domestic workers in order to provide a means of safeguarding their rights. In 2012, the Ministry had approved some 3,800 contracts. It also monitored the activities of institutions that brought workers into Qatar in order to ensure that employers were respecting those workers' rights.

54. **The Chairperson** said that she would like to know what actions the State party planned to take in order to counter existing stereotypes and to remove cultural obstacles to the realization of women's rights. She would like to urge the State party to consider developing a specific law on violence against women, which could serve as a powerful public information and awareness-raising tool.

55. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the Supreme Council for Family Affairs was working with all stakeholders to repudiate the stereotypes that were reflected in the media. The Council organized programmes and studies on violence against women and then posted their results on its web page. Those results indicated that violence against women in Qatar was not very prevalent. The Ministry of Labour was working with the police to gather information on the incidence of violence against female migrants.

56. **Mr. Al-Muhannadi** (Qatar) said that efforts were being made to foster a culture of human rights in Qatar. The Ministry of the Interior had set up special mechanisms to combat violence against women, and NGOs in all regions of the country were working towards the same objective.

57. **Mr. Al-Mulla** (Qatar) said that the Qatari Foundation for the Protection of Children and Women carried out awareness-raising campaigns, received complaints, operated a 24-hour hotline and partnered with government ministries and other stakeholders in the

country to safeguard children and women. The Foundation had developed a mechanism for following up on all cases in which women had been the victims of violence. It had also set up a working group of sociologists and medical doctors who specialized in cases of violence against women and ran welcome centres for women and child victims of violence.

58. **Ms. Haidar** said that she would like to know whether the Government envisaged making use of the media, putting up posters and/or calling on the assistance of NGOs in order to make domestic workers aware of their basic human rights, especially in view of the large number of such workers in Qatar.

59. **Ms. Patten** said that she wished to know how complaints of violence against women were handled in the absence of a specific law on the subject. She would appreciate further clarification on the review of the Family Code that was reportedly under way and would be interested in hearing whether the delegation considered the death penalty to be an appropriate penalty for physical assault in domestic violence cases.

60. **Ms. Acar** said that violence against women was indeed a universal problem that was based on a universal root cause, namely, gender inequality. Gender inequality was also the root cause of negative stereotypes. However, the gender-neutral approach reflected in the Criminal Code was not suitable because the problem was not gender neutral. The full extent of violence against women in Qatar could not be determined until the proper legislation and mechanisms for providing access to justice had been developed. She saw no reason why Qatar should not have a law on violence against women and urged the Government to join the other countries in the international community that had already done so. Calling on influential opinion leaders, especially religious leaders, to declare that violence against women was a crime under national law would be a way of mustering powerful support for such a law.

61. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that the Supreme Council for Family Affairs had tasked a committee with drafting a bill on violence against women. After due consideration, however, the Council had instead decided to address acts of violence against women as offences that were punishable under the Criminal Code. Special consideration was given to cases in which women were the alleged victims. A determination was made as to whether a case involved domestic violence, and women victims of violence were offered medical and psychological services.

62. **Ms. Al-Murekhi** (Qatar) said that Qatar was working on various fronts to review the Criminal Code and was considering the adoption of specific legislation on violence against women. To date, however, the Government was satisfied with the provisions of the Criminal Code that prohibited violence and with the safeguards that it provided for victims. Services were provided to victims of violence through governmental and civil society institutions.

63. She agreed that awareness-raising and education were of paramount importance in combating violence. The Supreme Council for Family Affairs distributed leaflets and put up posters in centres that provided victim protection services. It organized awareness-raising workshops and asked influential people in society to speak out about the need to combat violence against women. The Qatar Foundation for the Protection of Children and Women encouraged people to report cases of violence against women. Studies on the scope of violence against women in Qatar needed to be conducted in order to provide a basis for the formulation of policies to tackle the problem.

64. **Ms. Al-Easa** (Qatar) said that foreign female domestic workers could also seek protection from their respective consulates in Qatar. A special committee had been set up to review the Family Code and bring it into line with international standards.

65. **Ms. Al-Hur** (Qatar) said that the Qatar Foundation for the Protection of Children and Women launched periodic awareness-raising campaigns focusing on domestic workers. Seminars were also organized with the ambassadors of the countries that sent the largest number of domestic workers to Qatar, namely, India and the Philippines.

66. **Ms. Gabr** said that migrant and domestic workers were some of the people who were most at risk of human trafficking. A number of United Nations studies on the subject had been conducted. With the highest ratio of migrants to citizens in the world, Qatar was called upon to assume a greater share of responsibility for ensuring respect for the human rights of non-citizens. A case in point was the widespread practice whereby employers confiscated the passports of migrant workers. What measures were being taken to put a stop to that practice? Given that Qatar was a wealthy country, would it consider establishing a fund for the rehabilitation of trafficking victims, as well as increasing the number of welcome centres?

67. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she would like to have statistics on the number of persons who had been convicted and imprisoned for engaging in or procuring prostitution. Why did the law prescribe punishments only for prostitutes and pimps, while not ascribing any criminal liability to clients? She wished to know what kind of assistance was available for women who wanted to leave prostitution; what preventive measures were taken to combat the phenomenon of prostitution itself; and whether any awareness-campaigns were carried out in order to dissuade Qatari girls from becoming involved in prostitution. She would like to know whether the State party would consider decriminalizing prostitution in view of the evidence that suggested that its criminalization did not play a decisive role in preventing women from engaging in that occupation.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.